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SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL MK

SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: AMBASSADOR & EUSR PRESS ALBANIAN LEADERS FOR CLEAN ELECTIONS (CORRECTED COPY)

REF: SKOPJE 388

SUMMARY

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¶1. (C) The Ambassador and EUSR Fouere jointly pressed DUI's Ahmeti and DPA's Thaci on June 13 to instruct their supporters to exercise restraint and to demonstrate orderly conduct that would produce free, fair and peaceful election re-runs on June 15. Ahmeti said the government and DPA activists had been responsible for the violence and intimidation that marred the June 1 elections, but pledged to call on his supporters to reject violence or intimidation as tactics on June 15. Thaci blamed alleged Kosovar reinforcements supporting DUI for the June 1 violence and intimidation. He also accused the VMRO-led government of pursuing a "perfidious game" of inciting intra-Albanian conflict in order to deflect public attention from government shortcomings, but likewise said he would instruct his supporters to avoid actions that could lead to a repeat of the June 1 incidents. End summary.

U.S./EU: COMMIT TO CLEAN AND PEACEFUL ELECTIONS

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¶2. (SBU) The Ambassador and EUSR Fouere jointly met with eAlbanian DUI President Ahmeti and -- separately -- with DPA President Thaci on June 13 to press for clean and peaceful re-run elections on June 15 (reftel). They outlined steps the Ministry of Interior had taken to provide secure and orderly voting, including removing DPA-affiliated plainclothes police ("Alphas") accused of complicity in many of the violent incidents that marred the June 1 elections.

¶3. (SBU) The Ambassador told both leaders that we were concerned about reports that Kosovars would be brought to Macedonia as reinforcements for one or both parties. We were coordinating with KFOR to monitor border movements. So far, there was no evidence of a Kosovar influx. Both the U.S. and EU wanted re-runs in which electoral conduct was far better than it had been on June 1. We wanted both leaders to assure us that they would instruct their supporters to behave in a peaceful and orderly manner on June 15.

¶4. (SBU) Fouere told Thaci that EU HighRep Solana had been disappointed by the June 1 electoral debacle. Solana had asked Fouere to convey that Macedonia's EU accession prospects would be undermined if the June 15 re-run election was similarly flawed. He expected Thaci and all in his party and in the government to uphold international standards for

free and fair elections. A party aspiring to joint the next government would lose its legitimacy if it engaged in violence and intimidation to win elections.

DUI: GOVERNMENT AND DPA ARE TO BLAME

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¶ 15. (C) Ahmeti said the police had been complicit in the ballot-stuffing and violence that had marred the June 1 elections. DUI wanted to cooperate with the authorities to prevent such incidents on June 15. DPA, however, was inciting further aggressive behavior by promising its supporters that criminal charges would be lifted against perpetrators of electoral violence and intimidation. Ahmeti had asked PM Gruevski to send police backup forces to potential "hot spots" on the re-run day. The PM had been non-committal, though, pledging only to send high-ranking VMRO officials to serve as election monitors in those municipalities.

¶ 16. (C) Ahmeti said that if Thaci committed to an incident-free re-run day, that would be the outcome. If he used MOI forces again to intimidate voters, the outcome would be negative. Ahmeti proposed coordinating between the local electoral HQs chiefs from both parties to jointly monitor, together with the police, electoral activities at the polls on June 15. If that did not work, DUI would have to "take measures against intimidation" caused by DPA supporters.

¶ 17. (C) Referring to the Supreme Court's June 12 decision to annul a number of SEC decisions ordering re-runs at problematic polling stations (reftel), Ahmeti said the ruling had been "damaging and contrary to the law." The Court had overturned SEC decisions to order re-runs in some Tetovo polling stations where there had been abnormally high turnout and an excessively high number of invalid ballots, indicating a clear bias in that ruling. Nevertheless, Ahmeti said, he would publicly call on his supporters to reject violence or intimidation on June 15.

DPA: BLAME THE KOSOVARS, VMRO'S PERFIDIOUS GAME...

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¶ 18. (C) Thaci said Kosovar "muscle" had contributed to the violence and intimidation on June 1. He also blamed the VMRO-led government for its "perfidious game" to stain the reputation of Macedonia's eAlbanian community by pointing the finger at high-ranking DPA officials in the MOI and police as the ones responsible for the Election Day misdeeds. The officials did not, in fact, have much influence in the MOI ranks, Thaci claimed. VMRO was using such "perfidious tactics" to cover up electoral irregularities committed by its own supporters, and to stimulate intra-Albanian clashes to divert public attention from its own policy shortcomings. Furthermore, no one had complained about DUI landslide victories in some municipalities, such as Kichevo, "where Ahmeti's party had won 20,000 votes compared to DPA's 200."

¶ 19. (C) Thaci admitted that he bore partial responsibility for the June 1 incidents, but said other electoral "stupidities" (e.g., ballot stuffing in Saraj that produced 100 percent turnout!) were beyond his control. He pledged to tell his supporters that they would have to bear the blame and consequences for events on June 15 "if things got out of control." Wherever irregularities occurred, he would support additional re-runs. At any rate, he expected DPA to fare well in the June 15 voting, with his party trailing DUI by one MP seat at most.

¶ 10. (C) The Ambassador pointed out to Thaci that he did not have to be a willing participant in the VMRO "game" the DPA leader had described. Thaci concurred. June 15, the Ambassador continued, was a chance for eAlbanians to repair the damage done on June 1. There should be no additional re-runs, she added, since that would only add to intra-Albanian tensions.

¶11. (C) In a separate pull-aside with Thaci, the Ambassador assured the DPA leader that we did not care whether DPA or DUI won the elections, as long as the process was free and fair. We would, however, be very strong and resolute in opposing any outcome based on fraud, intimidation or violence. Thaci said he had erred in allowing DPA MP Daut Rexhepi (aka Commander Leka), and local gang leader Agim Krasniqi (now in police detention) to run amuck on June 1. The Ambassador noted that Krasniqi's brother had continued to threaten and intimidate eAlbanian voters in Tetovo, and Thaci said he would put an end to those actions. He promised the Ambassador personally, with a handshake, that his supporters would not engage in intimidation or violent actions on June 15, and that he would support arrests and convictions if they did.

COMMENT

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¶12. (C) Both Ahmeti and Thaci were calm and relaxed, in contrast to the agitation both had displayed before the June 1 elections. Ahmeti likely is calmly confident because he is positioned to pick up significantly more seats if the June 15 polling is free and fair. Thaci, however, usually appears most relaxed when he is hiding his trump cards. Our monitoring teams will be watching closely on June 15 to see how he will play his hand when the stakes will be highest: if the re-runs are, in the end, free and fair.  
Milovanovic